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ABSTRACT

The author contends that school food service should be tied directly to the educational process, because a child who eats properly will be both physically and mentally more receptive to learning than a child who is undernourished. A sound program of nutrition education should be developed to teach the child how to eat. The author further argues that if school food service is indeed a part of education, then it must be financed on the same constitutional basis as the rest of education -- equality of financial support for all students. (Author/MLF)

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THE CALL OF SERRANO

I want to talk with you about one week, one week in the 17 year history of my job. In some ways it was a very unusual week and yet in other ways, in the ways of the work we are trying to do, it was much like any other week. In the very first days of February of this year, I had occasion to fly from Denver to Seattle, from Seattle to Juneau, from Juneau to Seattle, from Seattle to Honolulu, from Honolulu to Los Angeles and from Los Angeles to Denver, all within a period of six days.

The first part of my mission was to testify before the Senate of the State of Alaska on behalf of a Universal School Food Service Bill, the second part of my mission was to explore convention facilities in Honolulu in anticipation of our 1976 convention in that city. As you can well imagine, the two parts of my trip were extreme opposites from one another. Alaska in the winter gives one the feeling that it is in a deep, peaceful sleep. The giant pines, shrouded in their blankets of snow, seemed like sentinels of some prehistoric era. The foot falls silently, the breath freezes quietly, all sounds of man are muffled by the marshmellow layers of snow. It reminds one of an articifical, picture-book landscape wrapped in soundless white velvet.

If we have described Alaska as a massive minature wrapped in white velvet, then surely Hawaii has to be a veritable Joseph's coat of many colors - the white of jasmine, the scarlet of hisbiscus, the blue of the water and the green of the hills.

Why do I open my remarks by telling you about my remarkable first week in February? Is it to brag or to gloat over the fact that I had this experience while someone

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else did not? Certainly not! Such a trip is not all joy. It is wet and snow and cold underfoot in Alaska; it is typhoon-like winds in Hawaii so severe that the chandeliers were stripped from the lobby of my hotel in Waikiki; it is so many hours of flying, so many hours of working, so many hours of not sleeping that I flew right home into two days of the flu. I share the experiences of my remarkable first week in February with you for two reasons:

I share with you the experience of such a week because of my fascination with this magnificent country of ours and because I continually marvel at the far-flung outreach of our organization. Second, and more important, I am fascinated by our determination to feed children - - ALL children. I am fascinated and encouraged by and in love with the concept of universality, the determination of our organization at long last to extend its helping hand to every child, to say all things are possible. What a magnificent day it will be when, at least partially through the vision and faith and work of our organization, we no longer ask the question, "Which child do we leave out?"

I would like to suggest to you three very basic reasons for the universal approach. The first is that I am thoroughly convinced our present approach to feeding children, an approach based upon economic segregation in the lunchroom, is unconstitutional. Secondly, think it is very wasteful and third very expensive. Let us take up these points one at a time:

Where would you think of educational history being made? Where would you look to find a turning point in the direction of public schools in our nation? Probably

not in the office of an elementary school principal and yet that is where it began five years ago. A Mexican-American psychiatric social worker by the name of John Serrano was called to the office of the principal in an elementary school in east Los Angeles, California where his two young sons were first and second graders. "You've got a couple of very bright kids - - get them out of east Los Angeles schools if you want to give them a chance," the principal bluntly told Mr. Serrano.

Of course, what the principal was talking about was ecnomic segregation. He was talking about the fact that financial support of schools is tied to local property taxes and therefore poor communities have schools of limited financial means while well-to-do, high tax base communities have schools of far greater financial means. John Serrano moved out of Los Angeles and took his family to a nearby upper-middle class neighborhood in search of better education for his children. Nevertheless, the gross unfairness of the situation continued to rankle him to the point that he became the prime mover in the now-famous case of Serrano vs. Priest (I. V. Baker Priest, Attorney General, State of California).

On August 30, 1971 by a six-to-one vote, the California State Supreme Court declared that inequality of education based upon economic segregation is unconstitutional. Similar cases have either been acted upon or are now pending in 23 other states - - a plethora of legal activity in a very few months time. The presentation of this case and the conclusions drawn by the vote have, in my judgement, enormous significance for the concept of universality in school foodservice. In presenting his case, the

attorney said, "We avoided concepts such as 'need' and 'educational opportunity' -- we ask only for equality." Can't you relate this in your own thinking directly to school foodservice? In a similar approach we would be avoiding such concepts as nutritional need and nutrition education and would ask simply for equality of treatment for all children.

Said the official complaint - - parents in low income areas were required to pay higher taxes than parents in economically-better neighbhorhoods and received less in return. Have we ever stopped to think that the paying parent is subject to double taxation? He pays for the meal of his own child, he pays taxes to help pay the cost of the non-paying child, and to add insult to injury - - in economically-depressed communities where the number of free meals is high, the meal actually served his child may suffer as well. The Court accepted the concept of FISCAL NEUTRALITY in education - - a concept of enormous significance to us.

In its decision, the Court said, "We recognize as we must that the right of education in our public schools is a fundamental interest which cannot be conditioned on wealth." School foodservice should not be conditioned on wealth either; it too is a fundamental right; it too should be a basic part of the educational opportunity and experience for EVERY child in our schools. Equality is the by-word in education today. Even before this court decision, we were engaged in a major bussing program

in a terribly cumbersome and artificial attempt to achieve equality in education; we are spending $1.5 billion to put 20 million children a school day into 256,000 buses and drag them over 2.2 billion miles per year in an effort to achieve equality in education.

Now, the courts have indicated that any approach other than equality is unconstitutional. If all children are to be given an equal opportunity in our schools, how can we longer tolerate a system which feeds one child at public expense, another child at partial expense, and very possibley leave out another child altogether?

<u>If economic segregation in our schools is unconstitutional, an economic means test is unconstitutional!</u> It is also wasteful. In the state of Colorado at the present time, we are in the midst of a legislative battle over no-fault auto insurance. Only recently, I heard the member of our state legislature who introduced the Colorado No-Fault Bill, make the comment on television that administrative costs of automobile insurance in our state are higher than claims paid - - in other words, it costs more to figure out who owes what to whom than it does to actually pay the damages. What a pathetic analogy there is here to school foodservices and the effort, time and money dissipated by our attempts to determine what child will be fed at what cost and what child will be left out.

Let us look at one specific example. The school district of St. Paul tabulates its actual "out-of-pocket" expenses for clerks, printing, tickets, envelopes and postage used in trying to determine the needy child at $26,000 per year. (Administrative

expenses are not included). This amount would purchase approximately 48,000 meals for the school children of St. Paul. But suppose we say this figure is more-or-less a median with many school districts larger and many smaller. With something over 17,500 school districts in the nation, suppose we multiply St. Paul's administrative costs by the number of school districts in the nation engaged in this tragic waste, we would come up with a startling figure of roughly $445 million a year - - the cost of economic segregation - - a total waste - - or enough money to pay for nearly a billion meals per year.

Also, in the costs of Public Relief I feel there is a tragic analogy to the waste of economic segregation. In the year 1971 for federal, state and local relief, we spent $17.5 billion; up $3 billion in one year. There are some interesting comparisons here - - we are now spending about $3 billion (in federal, state, local and personal expenditures) on our School Lunch Program to reach half the children and we estimate the universal program would cost only about $5 billion to reach ALL the children. The increase in the cost of our foodservice bill would be less than one year's increase in our Relief Bill.

Here is another reason I say economic segregation is wasteful. According to HEW's Health statistics: 242.3 million entire school days were lost by children of ages 6 through 16 due to illness and injury in 1969. We have ascertained that approximately 80% of this figure results from illness, 193.8 million lost days. If we stop to realize that it costs an average of $858 to educate a child for a 180/day school year, this would

give us a cost of $4.76 per child, per day. Therefore, 193.8 million days at $4.76 equals $922,488,000 lost because of poor health. That's almost a billion dollars - - good food at school could have prevented a lot of it.

There is yet another analogy to the waste of ecnonomic segregation. The Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare estimated that there was a loss last year of approximately $500 million in relief programs due, said Mr. Richardson, not to dishonesty but to honest confusion and mistakes. In other words, another ghastly expense of trying to figure out who deserves what from whom. It is interesting to note that at 60¢ a lunch, just the mistake in relief costs would pay for 833 million lunches or would be enough to provide a lunch every school day for a year for 4.5 million youngsters.

Finally, I have said that our present approach to school foodservice is expensive - - yes, expensive. It is expensive because it contributes to inequality in education, that fatal flaw that our courts tell us again and again must be eliminated. Again, I emphasize that equality of educational opportunity is the rallying cry of education today. President Nixon, in his address to the nation three days ago, stated that economic segregation in our schools must be eliminated and proposed an expenditure of $2.5 billion to upgrade particularly core city schools. Poor diets contributes to poor education and poor education makes poverty and privation self-perpetuating.

My memory is haunted by an example of self-perpetuating poverty - - a memory of a young boy with whom I talked in the hill country of Jackson County, Tennessee. The September heat lay heavy upon the mountain valleys, wasps droned with irritating freedom through the broken and unscreened windows of the one-room schools and I wondered what would ever serve as a stimulus to draw children into these unappealing surroundings. Usually it would not be the parents. Our discouraged school administrators told us of many home visits in the area, told us of imploring parents to send children to school, told us of parents who cared not at all if their children went to school, told us of parents who sometimes even actively opposed school.

As we drove down a dusty back road, we met a young boy of perhaps eight or nine years of age clad in a pair of bib roveralls, and probably nothing more. As we stopped to talk with him, he bashfully told us, while digging his toes in the dust of the road - - that he was indeed on his way to school, that he had heard that he could now get something to eat at school. While I asked the lad that most persistent and embarrassing question that all grown-ups seem to ask young boys, what he hoped to do when he grew up, he studied the patterns of dust welling up from his caked feet, shrugged his shoulders and said, "Oh, I dunno know; I reckon I'll draw." As we drove on to visit another school, I exclaimed with enthusiasm on the marvels of human ambition and the every-ready potential of education. The County Superintendent smiled at me sadly and said, "I am afraid the boy doesn't mean he will draw in the sense of art, he means he will draw in the sense of relief as his parents and grandparents have done before him

From community-to-community and from state-to-state the educational opportunity of our children varies greatly. Let us look briefly at the amount of money spent per pupil in the schools years 1969/1970 in various parts of the country.

STATE	HIGH	LOW
Alabama	$ 581.00	$344.00
California	$2414.00	$569.00
Connecticut	$2801.00	$444.00
Ohio	$1685.00	$413.00
New York	$1889.00	$669.00
Washington (State)	$3406.00	$434.00

All of this inequality is about to change. As it does, school foodservice should be tied to the educational picture initimately and directly in two ways. First,it makes a strong positive contribution to teaching a child anything. It improves his health, it improves his attention span, it improves his mental receptivity, it improves his average daily attendance record - - a child that eats properly is going to be both physically and mentally receptive in the classroom and teachable to a far greater degree than a child of whatever income who is now undernourished.

Secondly, school foodservice should be tied to the educational process through a sound and well-developed program of nutrition education to teach the child how to eat. If school foodservice is indeed a part of education, then indeed it must be financed on the same constitutional basis as the rest of education - - equality of financial

support for all students.

Universal school foodservice, in my judgement, is the vnaguard of this country's approach to meeting the nutritional needs of its populace. I see universal school foodservice, not only a magnificent program in its own right, but also the cornerstone of a national nutrition policy.

On a recent trip to southern California, I watched a young long-haired, tight-panted, guitarist sing and swing, "Put Your Hand In The Hand."

"Put your hand in the hand of the man who stilled the water. Put your hand in the hand of the man who calmed the sea. Take a look at yourself and you can look at others differently - - by putting your hand in the hand of the man from Gailiee."

The youngster was quite talented in his own right but the most amazing part of the evening was to see him and his fellow musicians - - the mod squad if ever there were one - - throwing heart and hip into a hymn while the oldsters - - some of them far beyond that danger mark of 30 - - were out on the dance floor throwing themselves about in wreckless abandon.

How remarkable the last decade has been in our nation, how many chasms have developed and how many chasms have healed. I agree with those who say the decade of the 70's will be a time of coming together again of our population, the time of working together for new priorities. Certainly an end to hunger in our nation must be among the highest of those priorities. Let us put our hand in the hand of one another and meet the final acid test of accountability in foodservice - - no more hunger or malnutrition.

All things are possible - - we can reach out and touch ALL children. Let us take a look at ourselves and define our job. Our job is not foodservice, our job is the physical and mental growth of all the children of our nation. What an exciting opportunity.

In 1 Timothy 4::14 we note the advice of St. Paul's letter to Timothy. "Do not neglect the gift that is in you." In the original Greek, the word for gift was karizm, our English word charisma.

Charisma is one of the most highly prized traits for any person in our society today. What is charisma? What is that strong, magnetic attraction that makes one personality stand out above others? It is not necessiarly a Ted Kennedy smile or the Lauren Bacall look. It is that most pervasive and persuasive of all human traits - - the giving freely and unstintingly of oneself to a cause and a purpose and a meaning bigger than himself. "Charisma" - - what a magic word.

It is the strength and the work and the knowledge of your hands and your head and your heart as you help to build strong bodies and receptive minds for children through good food. "Charisma!" It is the work of you alone as you minister unto children in ways unknown to Ted Kennedy or to Lauren Bacall; it is the work of our Association as we put our hand in the hand of the man from Gailiee and with one another to end hunger and malnutrition among our children for all time. "Charisma!" It is giving the gift that is in all of us to ask for the very last time the question, "Which child do we leave out?" And be able to answer - NONE!!

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